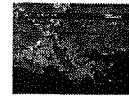


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THE INVESTIGATORS: Did LSP trooper's connection to stolen identity case lead to arrest of wrong person?

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POINTE COUPEE PARISH, LA (WAFB) - His life turned into a nightmare with one knock on his door.

Prakash Rayamajhi was living a quiet life in Massachusetts after he and his family emigrated from Nepal a decade ago, searching for a better life in the United States. They settled in the small town of Danvers, and Prakash found a job as a gas station clerk. They thought they had found a new life in the land of the free, but that dream turned into a nightmare when they heard a knock on their apartment door last summer.

"They asked me several questions about Louisiana," Prakash said.

At his door were several officers from the Massachusetts and Louisiana state police agencies. They were there to arrest him on 292 felony counts of online fraud. The allegations stemmed from an email phishing scam at Pointe Coupee General Hospital in Louisiana earlier that year.

In January of 2017, the hospital experienced a data breach in which the chief financial officer emailed 235 employee W-2 statements to a hacker who was posing as the hospital's CEO. The W-2s contained each employee's name, address, and Social Security number.

CFO John Cazayoux told Louisiana State Police investigators the email appeared to be from CEO Chad Olinde, according to the LSP affidavit.

The body of the email read:

// John,

I want you to send me the list of W-2 copy of employee wage and tax statement for 2016, I need them in PDF file type, you can send it as an attachment. Kindly prepare the lists and email them to me asap. Thanks. Chad Olinde

Sent from my iphone //

About an hour after receiving the email, Cazayoux attached all 235 W-2s and unwittingly sent them to the identity thief. All the while, the real Chad Olinde was in his office about 10 feet away from Cazayoux. Later that morning, Cazayoux asked Olinde if he received the files, to which Olinde replied, "What files?" That's when they realized the email came from a Comcast address not affiliated with the hospital.

Olinde declined an on-camera interview, but told the 9News Investigators that hospital administrators contacted the IRS, notified employees, and offered identity theft protection.

A "Hitchcockian" scenario

According to the arrest warrant for Prakash, the LSP Insurance Fraud Unit was called in to investigate after a hospital nurse reported her tax return was stolen. LSP investigators identified Prakash as a suspect because his name was registered to the Comcast email account used in the hack. Authorities brought Prakash back to Louisiana and booked him into the Pointe Coupee Parish Detention Center, where he spent six nights.

His daughter, Prash, says she and her family were still in Massachusetts — worried sick. "As soon as we parked, my sister told me my dad got arrested for white collar crimes, and I was shocked," she said.

Prash says from the moment she heard the news, she had no doubt police had the wrong man. "You need to know my dad. He's very bad with technology," she said. "He's a great person, taking care of us. He goes to work at 7 a.m. and comes back at 7 at night."

Criminal defense attorney, Beau Brock, who represented Prakash in the fraud case, says he has no doubt of his client's innocence. Prakash appeared lost and afraid when Brock first met him at the Pointe Coupee jail.

"This is worse than any Hitchcockian wrong man scenario," Brock said. "It's rare you meet people doing a criminal offense who are as pure of heart as Prakash."

The lawyer says he was convinced Prakash was innocent once he started reviewing the evidence in the case. And several months later, the FBI cleared Prakash of any involvement, Brock says. "They returned his computers and phones and passport after the interview," Brock said. "They got the wrong man."

Brock believes the real hacker simply used his client's identity to divert authorities in the wrong direction. But what was perhaps more shocking to Brock was that one of the LSP troopers who handled the investigation and even traveled to Massachusetts to arrest Prakash was Sgt. Eric Adams, the husband of a hospital employee, which makes him a victim of the crime he was investigating.

Connecting the dots

Brock says Sgt. Adams' personal involvement led him to rush the investigation and do a sloppy job.

In a lawsuit Adams later filed against the hospital and Prakash, Adams appears to portray himself as only a victim, making no mention of his role in the investigation, other than to say he emailed the hospital CEO and offered LSP's assistance. He goes on to say no one at the hospital took up his offer.

However, court records tell a different tale. The arrest warrant detailing state police's investigation portrays Adams as not just having a role, but as leading the investigation.

When Prash first saw the lawsuit, she connected the dots.

"Prash said, 'That's the same man who came to our house,' and I said, 'No, it's not. It can't be,'" Brock said. "Because they would never allow a person who was personally involved as a victim in a case investigate their own case."

Investigative reporter, Cheryl Mercedes, went to Sgt. Adams' house to ask him about the investigation. He was not home, but called later and said the LSP fraud unit, to which he is assigned, was simply acting on a complaint made by someone at the hospital. Adams referred additional questions to his attorney, Robert Evans, who declined an on-camera interview, but said he still believes Prakash is guilty.

Prakash had to hire a second lawyer, Yigal Bander, to defend him in the lawsuit filed by Sgt. Adams.

"After this monstrous injustice, the perpetrator of the injustice, misusing his awesome power as a law enforcement person, then goes and personally sues the person he's already wronged," Bander said. "I've never seen anything like that."

Prakash is working to clear his name, and his daughter fears if that doesn't happen soon, the allegations could stand in the way of her own future too. "The scariest part is the whole process of it, because I believed in the American justice system, the law," she said. "Before, I only saw the good side of it. I had never seen the ugly or bad side before."

LSP officials declined an on-camera interview, but sent a statement acknowledging that Sgt. Adams should not have been directly involved with the investigation. Nevertheless, the department does stand by the integrity of the investigation, which they confirm was turned over to the FBI.

The FBI would neither confirm nor deny their involvement.

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